

# Characteristics And Expectations Of French Spectators Of Women Soccer League

**Escoubes, Florian**

University of Toulouse 1, France

E-mail: florian.escoubes@iae-toulouse.fr

The last three years women's sport has considerably increased in popularity. The election of Serena Williams as "2015 Sport Illustrated sportsperson of the year" is one of the symbols of this development. Several indicators clearly show the overall evolution of the perception of women's sport in society. The popular enthusiasm for the 2015 Women's Soccer Cup is a good example of this social phenomenon. The whole competition was marked by very large audiences, especially in France where 4,1 millions spectators watched the semi-final (France vs Germany) in June 2015. However, this passion for international competitions does not seem to transfer to French women's championship. Attracting new sport spectators in stadiums is one of the main challenge of women's professional soccer clubs. During the 2015–2016 season, barely more than 630 spectators went to stadiums for watching games in France, which is very few.

Discerning fans' expectations is one of the ways clubs can change this situation. Therefore, this paper intends to present a new scale for measuring expectations of french spectators of women's soccer League and suggests typology of spectators sharing similar expectations.

This research was carried out with a representative sample of the spectators of 7 professional clubs of the elite (*Juvisy, Olympique Lyonnais, ASPTT Albi, ASJ Soyaux, Montpellier HSC, FC Metz Algrange*). The final sample consisted of 1379 individuals (53% male, 47% female; 68% was single, the average age was 29.4 and the average number of matches seen in stadium was 3,8, with 26% of spectators having seen no matches this season).

We first conduct 5 focus groups in order to capture the way fans spoke about women's soccer and suggest expectations specific to women's soccer. Especially, this qualitative stage enabled us to highlight the importance of players attitude on and out of the football field, as well as the important role of interactions between players and spectators, and the best mindset of women.

Based on those first results, we use and reinterprets scales of earlier studies (Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Asollant & Kada, 2010; Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2008; Hunt, Bristol & Barshaw, 1999; Koo & Robin, 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007) to create our own. However, the logic of our experience is somewhat different from the main researches in the literature. First we tried to list exhaustively the different spectator motivations. Then the objective was that each spectator evaluates the importance of each reasons on a 5 points Likert scale. Finally, from these assessments, we realized cluster analysis to identify profiles fans. The final Motivations and Expectations of Sports Spectators (MESS) Scale contains 24 motivation items.

Exploratory and Confirmatory factor analysis allows us to identify seven different factors: 1) Ambiance and fan support; 2) Football aesthetic; 3) Relaxation; 4) Social interactions; 5) Players; 6) Uncertainty of game; 7) Emotion. Based on these factors and effective attendee's behavior, we conduct a dynamic cluster analysis that allows us to identify 4 profiles of women's soccer spectators: A) Devoted Fan (34,3%), B) Show Seeker (19,5%), C) Occasional spectator relaxation (34,2%), D) Occasional spectator interactive (12%).

First, our study identify the main expectations of spectators: 1) Player's attitudes and their combativeness, 2) Beauty and aesthetic of the game, 3) Fair play and attitude of players, 4) Expectation of positive outcomes, 5) Experience intense feeling during the game. Our analyzes also show that these expectations vary very strongly between the different spectator profiles. While the "Devoted fans" come above all to encourage their teams (25%) and to see closely their favorite player (12,4%), "Show Seeker" looking for the beauty of the game (16,11%) and experience emotions during the game (11,82%), "Occasional spectator relaxation" want to see the fighting spirit on the ground (18,9%), fair play (11,57%) and feeling emotions (11,3%); "Occasional spectator interactive" expect interaction with players (19,8%) and spectators (17,6%) and observe top level's football (12,89%).

Finally, our typology allows us to differentiate spectators and may be used by sport marketers to attract new audiences to in their stadiums. In particular, our results shows that the current spectators of the French championship are very involved in women's sport and football in particular. They are also many more women in the stands, but gender does not appear to make difference on their expectations. Lastly, our results allowed us to emphasize the importance for spectators of the atmosphere of the women's matches, the better attitude on the field and the importance of interactions between players and spectators.

## References

- Bouchet, P., Bodet, G., Bernache-Assollant, I. & Kada, F. (2010). Segmenting sport spectators: Construction and preliminary validation of the Sporting Event Experience Search (SEES) scale. *Sport Management Review, 14*, 42–53.
- Funk, D., Filo, K., Beaton, A. & Pritchard, M. (2008). Measuring the Motives of Sport Event Attendance : Bridging the Academic-Practitioner Divide to understanding Behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 18*, 126–138.
- Hunt, K. A., Bristol, T., & Bashaw, R. E. (1999). A conceptual approach to classifying sports fans. *Journal of Services Marketing, 13*, 439–452.
- Koo, Y. & Robin, H (2008). Difference in Interrelationship between Spectators' Motives and Behavioral Intentions Based on Emotional Attachment. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 17*, 30–43.
- Won, C. & Kitamura, I. (2007). Comparative Analysis of Sport Consumer Motivations between South Korea and Japan. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 16*, 93–105.